



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

A COPY AFTER SCULPTURES OF NOTRE-DAME-
DE-PARIS

A SMALL ivory triptych (Fig. 1), recently acquired by the Rhode Island School of Design from the George A. Hearn collection,¹ affords unusual interest because of its relationship with some of the most splendid sculptures of the Middle Ages, sculptures of Notre-Dame-de-Paris.

A horizontal division breaks each leaf of the triptych into two fields. Four of the six compositions thus made possible are connected with the story of the Virgin. The other two are scenes from the life of Christ.

The subject of the lower register of the central panel is the Resurrection of the body of the Virgin. It represents the moment when Christ has come to fulfill the promise made His mother before her dormition. In the Golden Legend we read: "And the Saviour spake and said: 'Arise up, haste thee, my culver or dove, tabernacle of glory, vessel of life, temple celestial, and like as thou never feltest conceiving by none atouchment, thou shalt not suffer in the sepulchre no corruption of body.' And anon the soul came again to the body of Mary . . ."² Two angels at the head and foot of the tomb lift the cloth which supports the Virgin's body, while Christ stands behind in the attitude of blessing and five apostles quietly witness the event.

Above this scene is what *should* be the Coronation of the Virgin. The crowned Christ sits with His right hand lifted in blessing. In His left hand He offers a scepter which bursts into bloom. Perhaps we have in this scepter, which is to indicate the Virgin's new office as queen of heaven, a reference to her royal lineage

¹ *DeLuxe Illustrated Catalogue of the Geo. A. Hearn Collection*, 1918, no. 1002: "Carved ivory devotional triptych: The Dormition of the Virgin—The Virgin lies on the bier in death; above are God the Father and Christ enthroned. Two scenes in each of the wings. 14th century. Height, 5½ in.; width, 8½ in."

² The Golden Legend (Caxton's translation), 'The Assumption,' vol. IV, p. 241.



FIGURE 1.—IVORY TRIPTYCH: PROVIDENCE.

through the tree of Jesse,¹ or to Joseph's rod, which blossomed at the time of the betrothal. At Christ's right sits a crowned figure with hands clasped in adoration; but instead of the sweet face of the Virgin, we see a bearded head! An explanation of this striking incongruity, as well as that presented by the bearded head of one of the candle-bearing angels that kneel at the right and left of the two central figures, will be attempted later.

In the lower registers of the wings of the triptych are, at the left, three seated kings, ancestors of the Virgin; at the right, three seated prophets, who have announced her coming. In the upper divisions of the wings are represented two appearances of Christ. At the left, carrying a cross, He appears to one of the three Marys, while at the right is the *noli me tangere*. In the latter Christ carries a spade, so disguising Himself as the gardener.²

The obvious misunderstanding of subject in the Coronation and the meaningless gesture of Christ as He appears to the holy woman lead one to suspect that the ivory is a poor interpretation of some other work. And indeed we find that its carver employed no common model. The central panel and the lower divisions of the wings are copies of the tympanum sculptures of the Virgin portal of Notre-Dame-de-Paris (Fig. 2). The other two compositions are taken from the bas-reliefs of the choir en-

¹ Isaiah, XI, 1.

² John, XX, 14-17.

closure of the same cathedral (Fig. 3). From these lovely sculptures the unreserved copyist has selected what he could conveniently fit into his somewhat differently shaped fields. Details of the compositions, even to the folds of the drapery, are copied exactly, as far as that can be done while missing the finer beauty and sensitiveness of the model. The resulting copy is like the wrong side of a brocade; the outlines are there, but all the loveliness of color is lost.

What could be more monumental than the unbroken row of haloed heads of Christ and the twelve apostles in the Notre

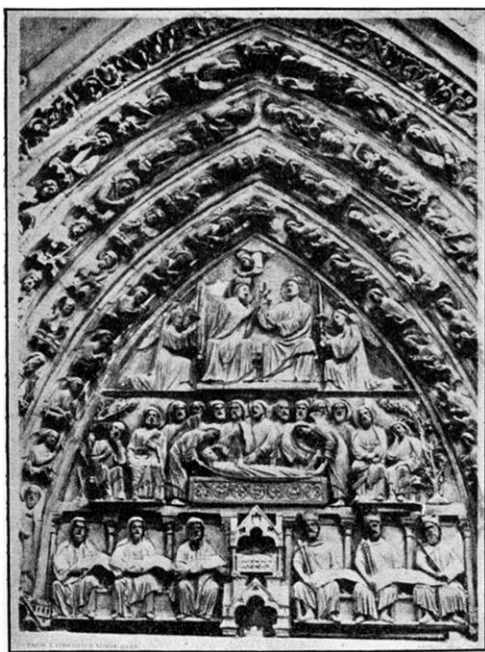


FIGURE 2.—THE VIRGIN PORTAL: NOTRE DAME.

Dame Resurrection of the Virgin! But aside from the difficulty of carving all of these, they were found impossible in the ivory because of the interference of the cusped arches in the upper part of the field. So only five of the apostles have been used. Two of these, Peter and Paul, are conspicuous at the extremes of the composition. One is at first surprised that instead of the expression of solemn wonder and meditation in the dignified faces of the Paris figures, grief and despair, which would

more appropriately accompany the *burial* of the Virgin, are suggested in the wrinkled faces of these five. But this does not necessarily imply incompetence on the part of the copyist. The two works were probably conceived with wholly different ends in view, the cathedral sculpture for a monumental world-wide testimony to the Virgin's glory, the small triptych for personal appeal to the individual. While the one moves the spectator to

awe and adoration, it is not inappropriate that the appeal of the other should be to pity and grief. The fine sweep of the Madonna's figure could hardly be missed, and it is more successfully copied than other parts of the composition. The angels, too, of the ivory are charming, though they stoop over the Virgin with a childish interest and haste, rather than with the calm, reverential movement of those in the prototype.

In the Coronation the copyist has strayed even further from the meaning and spirit of the model. One wonders how the most mediocre of workmen could have produced such a poor

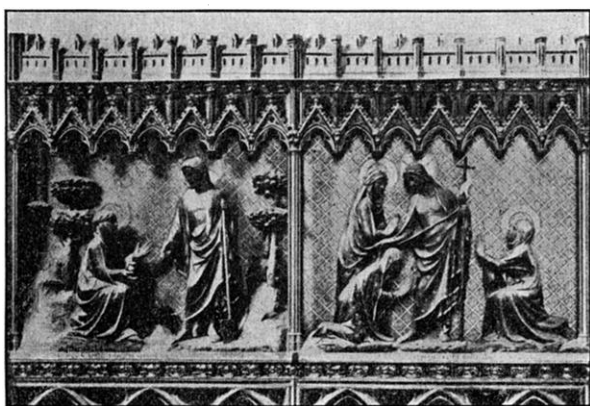


FIGURE 3.—RELIEFS FROM CHOIR: NOTRE DAME.

copy of this loveliest of all coronations. An unusually strong chin characterizes many figures of the tympanum. This is particularly noticeable in the case of the Virgin and the kneeling angel at the left in the Coronation. Can it be that the copyist has misunderstood these as bearded figures? Or perhaps because he had no space for the angel who appears in the apex of the tympanum to crown the Virgin, he thought to avoid the difficulty by substituting God the Father for the Virgin. The docile imitation and lack of imagination otherwise displayed by Gothic ivory carvers give more plausibility to the former explanation.

We must give the author of our ivory, however, a little more credit for originality when we come to consider his treatment of the kings and prophets. Here he has dared to deviate from the composition of his model, even though no deviation was necessitated by the shape of his fields. He has omitted the scroll

from the laps of the kings and used it only with the prophets, of whom it is typical. To keep the symmetrical appearance of the two groups, he has given each prophet a separate scroll, instead of placing one continuous sheet over the three laps. With the removal of their scroll, the disposition of the kings' arms has been slightly changed also, and now they *grasp* rather than *hold* their scepters. The prophets sit at the left in the tympanum and the kings at the right. In the ivory their order is reversed. Since the two scenes above them are reversed also, as regards the order of their prototypes, we may safely assume that the wings have been exchanged in attaching them to the central panel, perhaps because their contours made in that way better joinings, or it may have been simply an error. Since the compositions would look as well one way as the other, such a detail would have been of slight interest to our carver.

Aside from the omission of the trees in the panel of the Notre-Dame choir enclosure, the *noli me tangere* composition has been closely copied. The most apparent difference in the general outline of the group is due to the copyist's disregard of proportion in the figures and his approach to isocephalism. This makes the extended hand of the kneeling Magdalene, for example, reach as high as Christ's shoulder, while in the choir relief it reaches out to touch His lowered hand. In the companion piece to this scene there was room for only two figures, so but one of the three Marys of the choir relief has been copied, and for her model the more upright figure at the right of Christ has been the principal source, though some features, as the bent head, are suggestive of the pendant on the left. This change takes away all significance from the gesture of the Christ. He seems to be archly depositing something into the hands of Mary, while in the original He extends His hand in solemn blessing over the head of the kneeling figure, who bends low in humble worship.

A single glance is sufficient to show how far short of the perfection of the great thirteenth century sculptures¹ the ivory comes. Yet closer inspection reveals some absorption of their grace. The soft folds here and there, as in the headdress of the Mary we have just discussed, the wavy locks of the angels, and

¹ Fortunately, Viollet le Duc's restoration need not be taken into consideration here. His repairs on the tympanum are reported as but slight. Our ivory carver has not been literal enough in his translation of the choir reliefs to make eventual alterations of any significance.

the dignified heads of the kings and prophets, suggest that the copyist was not wholly immune against the glory of his model. But the chief interest of the comparison must remain in the fact that we have here a copy, perhaps as early as the fourteenth century, of some of the Notre-Dame sculptures, an example of the source of subject matter sought by Gothic ivory carvers.

Like much ivory work of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this triptych offers difficulties in regard to its date and particularly the nationality of its author. The fact that Gothic ivory workers were more craftsmen than artists and that copying other works was undoubtedly the rule rather than the exception accounts for these extraordinary difficulties. Closest analogies for our triptych are found in late fourteenth century German and French works. Though lacking sufficient reason for contention of Rhenish origin, we may suggest the comparison of its types of figures with examples of Rhenish wood and ivory sculpture.¹

FERN HELEN RUSK.

BROWN UNIVERSITY,
PROVIDENCE, R. I.

¹ W. Josephi, *Die Werke Plastischer Kunst im Germanischen Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg*, nos. 221 and 225. *Connoisseur*, XXX, p. 14.